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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 002013

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: POLITICS OF NIGERIA'S NORTHERN BORNO STATE

Classified By: Political Counselor James P. McAnulty
for reasons in Sections 1.4. (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Religious leaders, government officials, politicians, and journalists discussed the Borno political climate with PolOffs October 20 to 23 in Maiduguri. Most observers noted Governor Ali Modu Sheriff has a tight grip on state politics. Some observers credit Sheriff, who is nearing the end of his second and final term, with significant development improvements, while others say the governor remains out of touch with his people's needs. Interlocutors said the Governor's close hold on politics and his desire to identify an heir apparent as the next state governor have thus far stunted campaigning. End Summary.

SHERIFF: A NEW STANDARD OR OUT OF TOUCH?

¶2. (SBU) Borno State Permanent Secretary for Political and Cabinet Affairs Alhaji Hayatudeen Baba Omar told PolOffs October 20 to 23 that Governor Sheriff, in office since 2003, has completed 80 percent of his ten-point Agenda, with big successes in health, education, road networks, housing, water, and solar energy. He claimed that Sheriff enjoyed overwhelming support from local governments and the Borno State legislature, and that the challenge for the next governor will be to "do more than Sheriff."

¶3. (C) Africa Independent Television (AIT) Correspondent Patrick Ifeanyi Mark also praised Sheriff's development of the capital with improved roads and drainage systems. He suggested the Governor had "set a standard" to which future governors will be measured.

¶4. (C) Others disagreed. Borno State Deputy Governor Adamu Dibal claimed the governor was out of touch with the populace, and that people have left the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) as a result. An Izala himself, he opined the Boko Haram attacks would not have occurred if the state government had been in touch with its constituency. (N.B., The Izala, or Jama'at Izalatil Bidiawa Iqamatus Sunnah, is a popular conservative movement advocating return to the "true practice" of the Islam but not necessarily creation of an Islamic state. End Note.) Dibal maintained he enjoys such popular support that he can travel without security details and "stop anywhere" without concern for his safety.

2011 GUBERNATORIAL CANDIDATES

15. (C) Unlike many state capitals experiencing a flurry of electioneering, Maiduguri is largely devoid of posters, radio slogans, or other campaign paraphernalia. Dibal said the governor's had such an iron grip on political power that no one is ready to start campaign activities, but he expected them to get underway in January 2010.

16. (C) The Deputy Governor, the Borno State People's Democratic Party Chairman Baba Basharu, and AIT Correspondent Mark all agreed that Sheriff would pick the ANPP candidate and provide the funding to ensure his election. Despite the Governor's public statements to the contrary, both Dibal and Basharu alleged the Governor is grooming his younger brother, Mala Sheriff, as his replacement. The Deputy Governor QMala Sheriff, as his replacement. The Deputy Governor implied he would contend for the Governor's seat himself. He averred that while he has the capacity and support to clinch the election, he lacks financial capital and would need to approach the Governor "begging" for funding. Still, Dibal boasted that Kano State Governor Shekarau (also an Izala) served as his mentor, and that opposition parties had come forward to offer their candidacy to him.

17. (SBU) Unlike in other Nigerian states, rotation of candidates by zones reportedly will not be a factor in Borno. Permanent Secretary Omar opined that regional rotation compromised efficiency and professionalism unless the zone

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possessed a vast, diverse expanse. Likewise, Borno State People's Democratic Party (PDP) Chairman Basharu said zoning can rule out competent candidates.

THE OPPOSITION'S WOES

18. (C) Dibal noted Sheriff's partisan approach to leadership, saying "those individuals not in the ruling party are suffering." Basharu told PolOffs that while the Governor claimed to be an advocate of unity government, he did not have any PDP ministers. He bemoaned, "if you are from the Sheriff family you can become anything; if you are not, you are nobody." Basharu said the PDP had no clear candidate and attributed lack of PDP success in Borno to "too many big men" from the state in Abuja diverting interests. He felt ignored by the national PDP, which has extended political support to Sheriff. Finally, the PDP Chairman expressed concern that the state's joint security force, Operation Flush II, are "flushing out everybody's rights" and will be used by the government to cow voters into submission. He claimed that "free and fair elections" could not occur with this type of "intimidation."

SANDERS